



Interview Summary: Bill Matthews and Stephanie Beck, Department of National Defence

Background

The Department of National Defence (“**DND**”) supports the Canadian Armed Forces (“**CAF**”). DND and CAF play complementary roles in providing advice and support to the Minister of National Defence and implementing Government decisions regarding the defence of Canadian interests at home and abroad. . Minister Anita Anand serves as the Minister of National Defence. A team of civil servants headed by the Deputy Minister provides policy advice to the Minister while the Chief of Defence Staff (the “**CDS**”) provides military advice to the Minister and to the Prime Minister.

Two senior civil servants, Mr. Bill Matthews and Ms. Stefanie Beck, attended this interview. Minister Anand was interviewed separately from Mr. Matthews and Ms. Beck. The present interview summary should be read alongside the summary of Minister Anand’s interview and DND’s institutional report.

Mr. Matthews is the Deputy Minister of DND (“**DM Matthews**”). His main responsibilities include running the department, providing policy advice to Minister Anand, and implementing decisions taken by the Minister. An example of policy advice would be advising the Minister as to whether she has the authority to take a given action as well as provide options on how a decision can be implemented. As mentioned above, DM Matthews does not provide military advice to the Minister – that is the role of the Chief of Defence Staff, General Wayne Eyre. DM Matthews and Gen Eyre’s teams are nonetheless very integrated.

Ms. Beck is the Associate Deputy Minister of the department (“**DMA Beck**”). She was performing the Deputy Minister’s duties in Ottawa between January 31, 2022 and February 4, 2022 while DM Matthews was traveling in Ukraine with Minister Anand.

The witnesses were interviewed in a panel format by Shantona Chaudhury, Yves Côté, and Sajeda Hedaraly on August 25, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Sajeda Hedaraly.

Text contained in square brackets consists of explanatory notes provided by Commission Counsel to assist the reader.

Information Flow between Department and Minister

The Deputy Minister has frequent verbal touch points with the Minister to provide updates or advice. Major decisions are always made in writing, either through formal memoranda or emails. When asked about the use of text messages, the witnesses confirmed that text messages were only used for quick updates or for logistics, not for decision-making.



Minister Anand attended a number of Incident Response Group (“**IRG**”) meetings. [The IRG served as the dedicated forum for federal Ministers, including the Prime Minister, to provide and receive operational updates, deliberate, and make decisions pertaining to the protests through an accelerated Cabinet process.] To prepare her for these meetings, DND would prepare speaking notes if Minister Anand was on the agenda for the meeting. If she was a participant to the meeting, she would be briefed orally and draft speaking notes would be prepared only if it was anticipated that she would be involved in discussions.

Intelligence regarding the Protests

DND’s intelligence function is focused on external threats, not domestic matters. At the time of the events, DND’s focus was on the developing situation in Ukraine.

DND’s information regarding the protests came from open source information and other federal departments. The Convoy first came to the attention of DMA Beck and DM Matthews through the media in late January 2022. Either DM Matthews or DMA Beck attended meetings of the Deputy Ministers Operations Committee (the “**DMOC**”), which was chaired by the National Security Intelligence Advisor and in which they received information from other federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Public Safety (“**PS**”), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“**CSIS**”), and the Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (“**ITAC**”).

DND was not aware of any specific threat to defence establishments across the country, although, DM Matthews mentioned that personnel wearing military uniforms or masks were the target of harassment. They directed DND employees and CAF members to work from other locations during the occupation. There was no damage or attempt to infiltrate military establishments, although the access to some of these establishments, including DND’s headquarters in Ottawa, was impeded and the National War Memorial was desecrated. Some DND employees were also harassed by protestors. At the height of the protests, DND asked its personnel not to work downtown in Ottawa in order to avoid any potential issues.

Relationships with Other Actors

In addition to the DMOC meetings mentioned above, DND had formal communications with PS for domestic Requests for Assistance (“**RFAs**”). [RFAs are the mechanism by which provinces can formally request support from the federal government for their emergency response efforts. These are coordinated by PS.] DND is usually aware of an RFA before a formal request is made, as PS will advise it informally of potential RFAs.

During the protests, a senior officer of the Canadian Armed Forces (“**CAF**”) was assigned to the National Capital Region Command Control (the “**NCRCC**”), a planning cell that included representatives from all relevant levels of government and law enforcement agencies. This senior officer did not play an active role in the NCRCC. His role consisted mainly of information gathering. Other than its involvement in the NCRCC, DND had no



formal exchanges with provinces, cities, or local police services. There may have been informal exchanges in regions where Canadian Armed Forces Bases (“**CFBs**”) are located, stemming from pre-existing relationships between the local authorities and CFB personnel.

DND’s Involvement during the Protests

As mentioned above, at the time of the protests, the fast-evolving situation in Ukraine was the main focus of DND.

Requests for Assistance

Prior to the Convoy protests, DND always had at least one RFA underway for various reasons (such as the COVID-19 pandemic, floods, or forest fires). DM Matthews estimated that since March 2020, the federal government has received over 200 such requests. Much of the assistance rendered has been through the military.

The RFA is a well-known process. As mentioned above, the formal communication comes to DND through PS.

DND received two RFAs during the protests, which were both approved by the Minister and ran very smoothly. The RFA process is used frequently and generally works very well. In order to fulfill an RFA, DND confirms that the requested assistance is in the public interest, that the situation cannot be resolved effectively without the assistance of the CAF, and that the department has the resources to respond effectively to the RFA. Provided this test was met, DND was open to providing assistance with non-facing tasks, such as giving other agencies access to military infrastructure. Not all RFAs come to fruition.

On January 28, 2022, DND received an RFA from the Ontario Solicitor General to utilize the Cartier Drill Hall parking lot in Ottawa. The request was sent to Minister Bill Blair (Emergency Preparedness) and Minister Marco Mendicino (PS) on behalf of the Ottawa Police Service (the “**OPS**”). The request was made specifically for the use of the Cartier Drill Hall by the OPS to stage its public order units, but was broadened to include access to infrastructure for possible use by law enforcement in general. This broadening would have facilitated further requests, if any, for access to military infrastructure. DMA Beck mentioned that the Cartier Drill Hall parking lot was in effect of little use to the OPS because of protests held nearby.

On February 16, 2022, the Parliamentary Protective Services (the “**PPS**”) requested support in acquiring rations to support their staff. [The PPS provides physical security within the Parliamentary precinct in Ottawa.] This RFA from the PPS was approved. Twelve hundred ration packs were provided by the CAF to PPS on February 19, 2022.

Other potential RFAs were contemplated but were never made to DND. DND notably considered a possible request for use of military planes to fly law enforcement officers to various parts of the country. This was ultimately not necessary as domestic flights were



an adequate means to move officers.

[Please refer to the summary of Minister Anand's interview for a description of an anticipated RFA from Alberta.] To the witnesses' knowledge, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney was not directly in touch with DND. In their view, Premier Kenney's point of contact with the federal government would have likely been PS or the Privy Council Office.

Possible Military Involvement

DND's role is to be ready for all eventualities, and a responsible Deputy Minister would not let their department be caught unaware. Thus, DM Matthews requested that DND plan for the possibility that the CAF might be called out to intervene in the protests. Departmental officials considered a few scenarios and internally developed potential plans. These plans considered the use of military equipment, infrastructure, and deployment of CAF members.

The panel strongly emphasized that CAF members are not police officers. They are trained to use lethal force, not do crowd control. Indeed, the domestic use of military force is, and in their view should always be, seen as a last resort. The panel noted that the shadow of the Oka Crisis still looms large. It was clear throughout DND's planning that the government and the Minister did not want to deploy the military during the protests. Everyone was very concerned that deploying the military in any way would inflame tensions with the protesters. DM Matthews and DMA Beck conveyed these considerations and concerns to other departments and agencies through DMOC meetings. Thus DND's planning never even reached the stage of being communicated to the Minister or shared with external organizations. It was a necessary planning exercise, but the option of deploying the CAF was never seriously considered.

The panel also confirmed that no request was made during the protests for CAF involvement in "Aid of the Civil Power". [Part VI of the *National Defence Act* (the "**NDA**") provides for CAF involvement, at the request of a province, to assist civil authorities in suppressing or preventing a riot or disturbance of the peace.]

Use of Military Tow Trucks

In preparation for possible requests from other departments or levels of government, DND considered whether military tow trucks could be used during the protests. There were several issues with the use of these trucks.

First, these tow trucks are not designed to be used on the types of vehicles that were involved in the protests. They are heavy-duty wreckers designed to pull heavy, disabled military vehicles off the battlefield, such as tanks out of ditches. Their use would likely have considerably damaged both the roads on which they would have been used and the vehicles being towed.



Second, the CAF tow trucks are very large vehicles, such that moving them to the locations where they might be needed would have required a significant logistical effort. They would have drawn significant attention to themselves and the CAF members operating them.

Third, the trucks are quite old and require frequent maintenance. DND has plans to replace these trucks.

CAF Members and the Convoy

During the protests, it became known through social media that some CAF members publicly expressed support for the Convoy. The CAF have disciplinary processes in place to deal with breaches of military rules. The witnesses were not in a position to provide information on the status of these matters.

Members of the military who refused to be vaccinated were also released from duty, as there was no option of leave without pay for them. This was not well received by some members or former members of the CAF.

Concluding Thoughts

DM Matthews expressed the view that the interaction between the RFA process contained in the NDA and the *Emergencies Act* could benefit from some clarification.

The panel also noted that there appears to be a discrepancy between public perception and reality when it comes to the role of the CAF. There were repeated calls from the public, the media, and even certain authorities to use the CAF to end the protests, which in the panel's view indicates that the role and capabilities of the military are not well-understood. The witnesses emphasized that the resort to military force domestically should always be an absolute last resort.